

IT'S MORE THAN WHAT WE SAY: THE POWER OF LISTENING

Child Feelings About the Child Welfare System

- Usually traumatized by the removal
- Worried about their parents
- Want to be with their siblings
- Often don't know why they were removed
- Resent the lack of information
- Want more input on decisions that affect them

RESISTANCE TO ATTACHMENT

- Children in care grieve the loss of their families, no matter how peculiar or dysfunctional the family is
- Children who have already suffered serious losses do not feel safe trusting a new person
- Small events can cause significant damage to the new relationship

CARDINAL RULES IN TALKING WITH CHILDREN

- Don't assume they are happy to be with a "better" family
- Avoid clichés (How do you like school?)
- Allow children to talk about their feelings, even their negative feelings
- Be careful about touching children in care
- Give children as much information as you can- what is happening? Why?

LISTENING TO CHILDREN

- Children in care have often learned to be indirect with their communication
- Young children may not have all the words they need to tell you what they are feeling
- Children in the system often tell you what they think you want to hear

REFLECTIVE LISTENING

- Lets child know you have heard the feeling and the meaning behind words
- Establish eye contact
- Hear and define feeling
- Clarify what you don't understand
- State the feeling (You feel *__state feeling__* because *__state reason behind feeling__*).
- Help children learn words for feelings

OTHER TECHNIQUES

- Open- ended questions
 - Cannot be answered in a few words
 - Encourages a child to talk and gives richer information
 - Children's responses tend to be more accurate with open-ended questionsExample: Tell me about your visit with your father?
- Close-ended questions
 - Allows the questioner to focus the interview
 - Can be answered in a few words
 - Places responsibility for the conversation on the interviewerExample: Did you have a good visit at your fathers?"
How old are you?
- Leading questions
 - Also called suggestive questioning
- Some examples:
 - Are you visiting with your brother every weekend?
 - Are you happy living with your grandparents?
- How would you turn these into open ended questions?

WAYS TO ENCOURAGE TRUST

- Tell the truth- don't tell the child one thing and the caseworker or foster parents something else
- Allow the child to have as much control as possible over what is happening to them
- Don't expect them to stop caring about their parents
- Don't react negatively to their negative feelings
- Make sure they know when you cannot maintain confidentiality

RESOURCES

- How to Talk so Kids will Listen and Listen so Kids will Talk, Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish, 1980
- Interviewing Children & Child Development. American Association of Law Schools, 2005.
- Parenting Young Children. Don Dinkmeyer, Sr., Gary D. McKay, James S. Dinkmeyer, 1989.

Helping Children Find the Words

When we work with children, they may struggle to find the right words to tell us how they feel. If we are going to achieve an accurate understanding of what the child is feeling about everything that is happening around them we may have to help them learn the words that describe their feelings. Many of the children we work with will talk about only two feelings, often "mad" and "happy."

Other words for "mad"

Angry
Confused
Disappointed
Frightened
Hate
Hurt
Left out
Mad
Sad
Scared
Unfair
Unhappy
Worried

Other words for “happy”

Appreciate

Better

Enjoy

Excited

Glad

Good

Great

Like

Love

Pleased

Proud

Relieved

FEELING FACES

